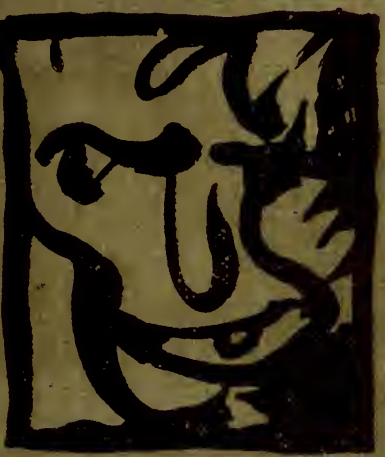
BOOK PLATES



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BOOKPLATES BY
FRANK BRANGWYN R.A

GREATER IS HE THAT
RULETH HIS OWN SPIRIT
THAN HE THAT TAKETH
A CITY

BOOKPLATES BY FRANK BRANGWYN R.A

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FOREWORD

HE genesis of the Bookplate must be sought afield. We are making up for lost time and promise soon to be in the van, thanks to the many brilliant stylists who now devote their art to the subject; but while we were still content with armorial bearings for these attractive symbols, and had not escaped the tyranny of couchant lions, rampant leopards and chimeras dire, other nations already began to see the humanity implicit in ex-libris, and the designs of Albert Dürer, Hans Holbein and the "Little Masters" of Germany, though they still embrace coats and crests and mottoes, lead the way to fresher air and better ground. Our modern bookplates are now nearly free of the Herald's Office; and other extraneous influences, including the French style and convention, have been abandoned for more fluent beauty, humour and imagination. In fact, a happy future is dawning for these fine things, and the time must quickly come when no book-lover, worthy the name, can deny himself a work of art to link him with his book, long after his eyes shall read and his hands embrace it no more.

We have already followed James Guthrie's admirable advice (than whom no man better understands what may become a bookplate), and "let go the coat-tails of our ancient heroes to do some wayfaring on our own account."

What, then, should an ideal bookplate be? Emphatically not a picture of the master's crest, or his coat, his house

or his library, but a line between his own personality and the treasure it adorns—a sign for other eyes, by which the possessor still holds for ever a sort of spiritual right in his volume, that owners to come should recognise and respect.

The proprietor's name and achievement must fitly be recorded: there should be close identity with him, and him only, for whose sake the work of art was created. It should be a sign for the initiated, a statement of facts in terms of fancy and pictorial poetry. But "The Bookplate Magazine" has created the necessary rallying-point for those who love the subject, and all that is being thought, said and done in this precious matter may there be learned by the growing body of enthusiastic connoisseurs devoted to it.

For me there remains only the easy task of introducing one who needs no introduction. Of Frank Brangwyn it may be said that panting processes toil after him in vain. He exhausts their capabilities one after another, and his resources are equally at home in a fresco on the Royal Exchange, or a woodcut for our most cherished incunabula. To interpret truth by beauty has been his difficult task and life-long ideal, and he brings to the miniature face of a bookplate, as to everything, that ambition. Nor is his distinctive quality of breadth and mass lacking. They are part of himself, and he would doubtless convey them into the carving of a cherry stone. He is always rather tremendous; always concerned with immense patterns, or great chiaroscuro; with the motion of toiling men, the labour of the fields, the centres of industry, where light and darkness echo the spirit of humanity that moves through them, now in peace now in pain. He shows here

what a very big thing a little plate can be, and proves again what needs no proof: that size has nothing to do with magnitude. He is always a "king of infinite space." And now he has made the wood-block his own, as his recent Belgian work already testifies. If we compare a Bewick bookplate with a Brangwyn, the point is made, and we see at once how the later master has imparted to the medium a breadth and vigour and a sense of light and space surely never achieved until he handled the block. The old English quality is there, and the tradition that always made our work so notable is respected; but that masculine forthrightness and grip—the sign-manual of Brangwyn's many-sided art—is also here; and it sets his woodcutting on a plane with his own highest. He has never worked to better purpose in this medium than among these vigorous little masterpieces—so beautiful of line, so full of accomplishment and imagination.

Critics will measure their technical importance and advance; it is enough for us, who are not critics, to accept the challenge of their positive beauty and rejoice in a new manifestation from this magistral hand.

EDEN PHILLPOTTS

A TECHNICAL NOTE.

IMMEDIATELY you paste a bookplate to the inside cover of a book it becomes part of that book, as integral a part as the title-page. The task of an ex-libris designer is something more than the making of a symbolic design. Mural painters, such as Brangwyn himself, when planning a mural decoration, have in their mind's eye its future site. The mind's eye of the ex-libris designer must needs be on the ultimate location of his design—the inner cover of a printed book. His technique must be wedded to the technique of the printer; the bookplate must be at one with the type and illustrations used in the book which it is to preface. The ideal would doubtless be a specially designed bookplate for each volume; but this is not practical politics. So the artist compromises. His problem becomes one of designing a plate to harmonise with the founts most frequently used in book production.

Type is a form of relievo engraving: for this reason the most sympathetic medium for bookplates is also a relievo process, wood-engraving. Intaglio processes, such as engraving and etching, have been used for bookplates. In the days when copper and steel engravings "embellished" books, these plates were satisfactory. But the free quality of an etched line is not of the same family as a page of printed type; it companions better the manuscript, the holograph. The majority of Brangwyn's best ex-libris is cut in wood.

When a draughtsman makes a drawing on paper he weaves a web of black lines on a white surface. Delicacy results easily and naturally—the natural speaking voice of a fine pen. The wood-engraver reverses the process; he works from dark to light. A "pull" from a virgin block prints dead black. The graver takes the place of the draughtsman's pen; each time it touches the block it leaves a scar that prints white. The "natural voice" of a graver is a white line on a black ground. That is its peculiarity which the law of fitness demands the craftsman to respect. In the same way as it is possible to speak or sing in an unnatural voice so is it possible for a wood-engraver with patience and skill to imitate a delicate line drawing. But save in facsimile work this imitation is not desirable. The tool should ever be allowed to dictate technique, to speak in its own voice. Look at the Helen Wilson plate number 31. Look at it as a mosaic of white shapes and dots and dashes cut from a rectangle of dead black. This design has been thought out and developed on wood with a graver. Notice how the archaic lettering harmonises. Compared with the freedom of a pen drawing there is in a woodcut always a trace of stiffness and archaism which gives it that touch of austerity and dignity so desirable. In this plate we see illustrated all the peculiar and indigenous qualities of a woodcut—strength, strong contrast, richness, a suggestion of "fat" colour. Then compare this plate with this page of type. You will realise then how great is Brangwyn s sense of fitness.

This sense manifests itself also in his lettering. It is always part and parcel of the design—always legible. Substitute the lettering of either of John Gilmer plates

(numbers 1 and 43) for that of the Esser plate (number 23), and you will see how the subtle unity of each plate is impaired.

Fitness and simplicity, the twin imprints of a great craftsman, have always marked the work of Frank Brangwyn. He is a master of many mediums, a powerful personality; yet great enough not to overwhelm his materials but to allow their personalities to manifest themselves naturally. He speaks through his materials ever respectfully mindful of their limitations.

E. HESKETH HUBBARD

LIST OF PLATES

Frontispiece	Sketch: key and three coloured blocks cut on wood
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Plate Two	Paul Berain, Paris
Plate Three	Estella Canziani, London; woodcut
Plate Four	Bernard Bergl, London; pencil sketch
Plate Five	Eden Phillpotts; woodcut
Plate Six	Pencil Sketch
Plate Seven	Lawrence Calder
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Plate Nine	Hugh Stokes, London
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Plate Eighteen	Henry Harrison, Bournemouth
Plate Nineteen	Matthew Brangwyn, London
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Plate Twentytwo	William Upland, Brighton
Plate Twentythree	Rev. Father E. Esser, Crowle
Plate Twentyfour	Henry Harrison, Bournemouth
Plate Twentyfive	Irvin Rivers, London
Plate Twentysix	Rev. James Hazell, London
Plate Twentyseven	James Gardener, New York
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Plate Twentynine	Crossley Davis, London
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Plate Thirtytwo	R. M. Kitson of Roundhay, Leeds; woodcut (unevenly impressed)
Plate Thirtythree	E. Shaw, London
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Plate Fortyseven	Jane Owe, London
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Plate Fiftysix	Richard A. Cooke, Honolulu, U.S.A.
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Plate Fiftyeight	Sketch for a Bookplate
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Plate Sixty	Charles Bradley, Westminster
Plate Sixtyone	Mario Borsa, Milan
Plate Sixtytwo	The Avenue Press, London
Plate Sixtythree	Rev. Father James Hazell, London
Plate Sixtyfour	Sketch in two colours
Plate Sixtyfive	Paul Turpin, London
Plate Sixtysix	Charles Holme, London
Plate Sixtyseven	Walter C. Bradley, Westminster
Plate Sixtyeight	W. Ruhr, London
Plate Sixtynine	Charles W. Cous, Antwerp

BOOKPLATES BY
FRANK BRANGWYN R.A

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PAUL BERAIN
EX LIBRIS

ESTELLA
CANZIANI

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BERNARD. BERGL 1914

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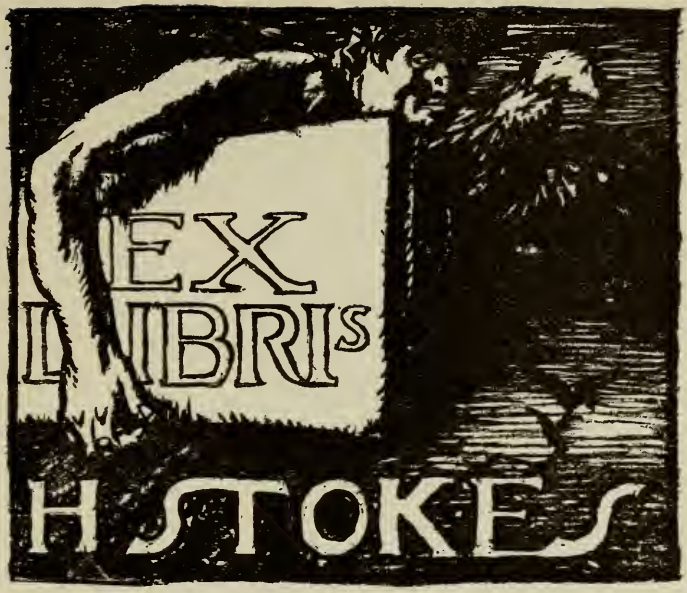
Lorenz Taler · Ex libris
Miserum Est Aliorum
incumbere famae Et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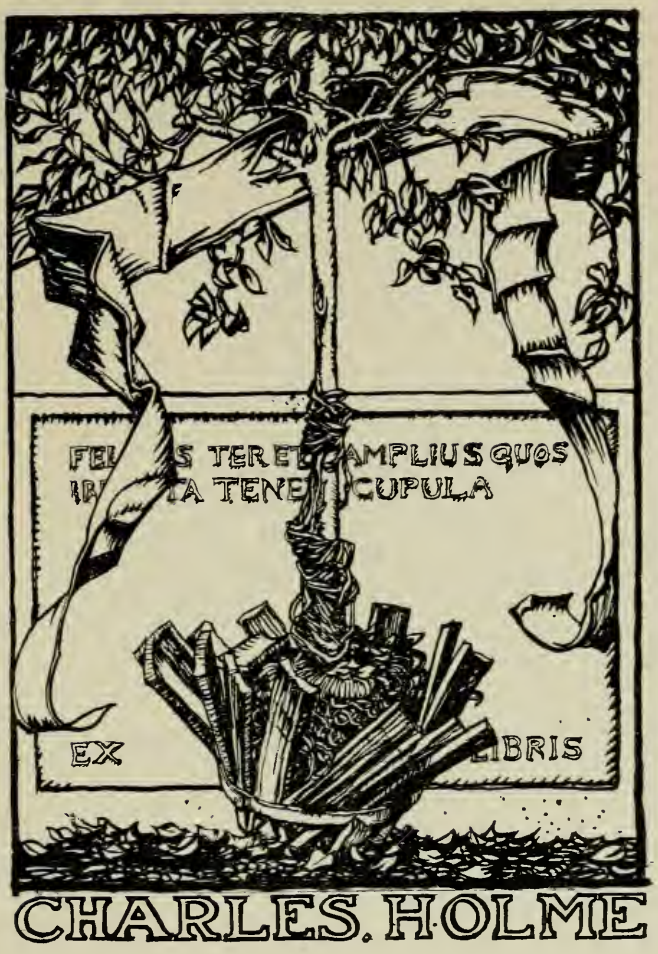
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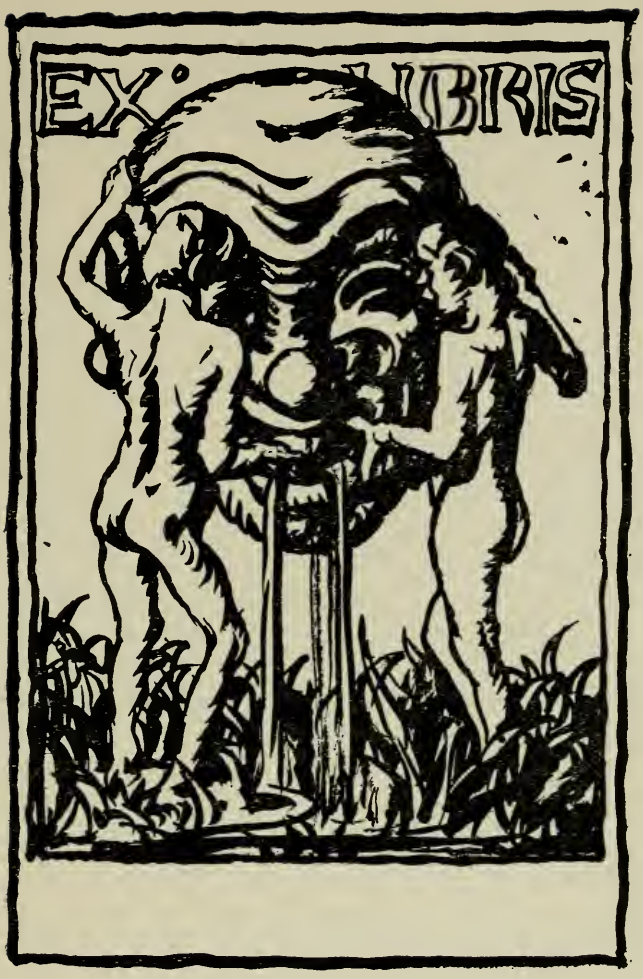
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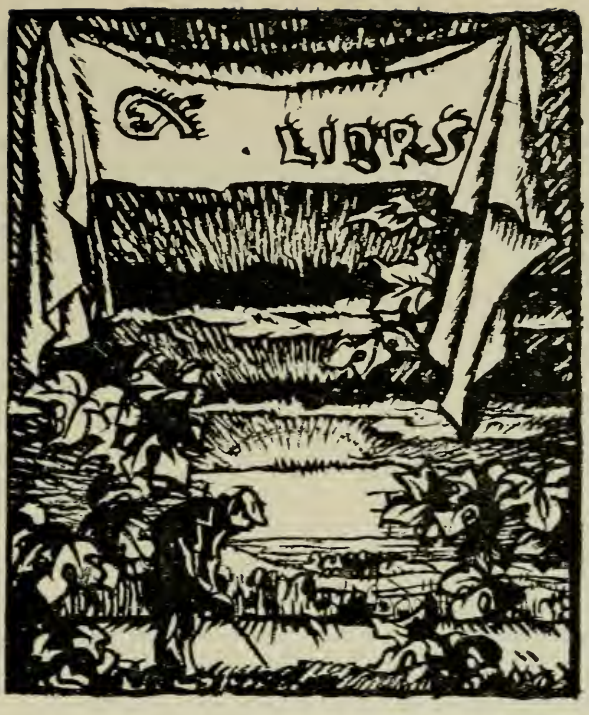
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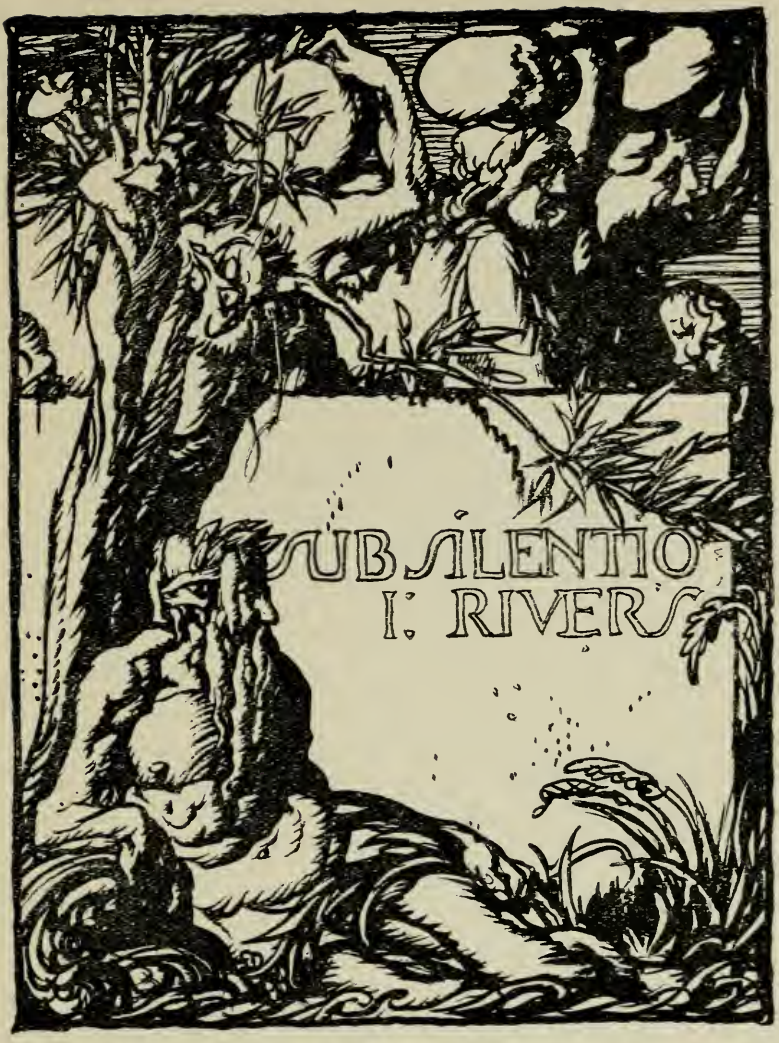
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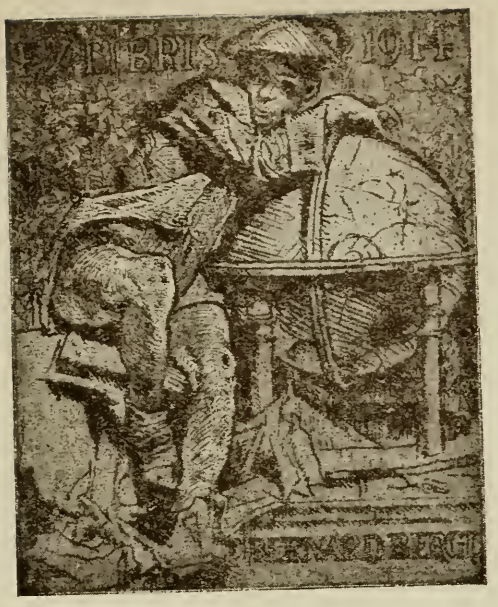

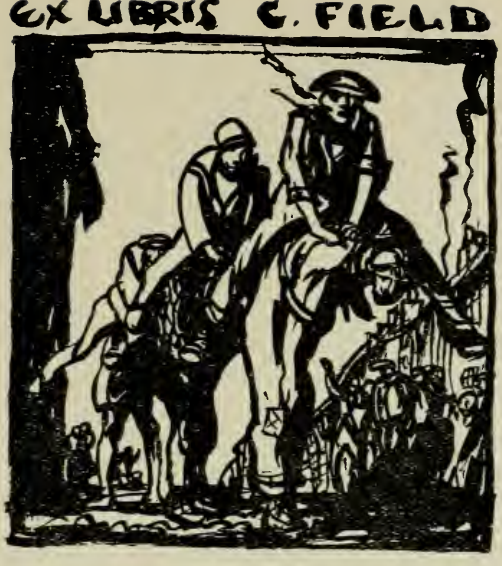
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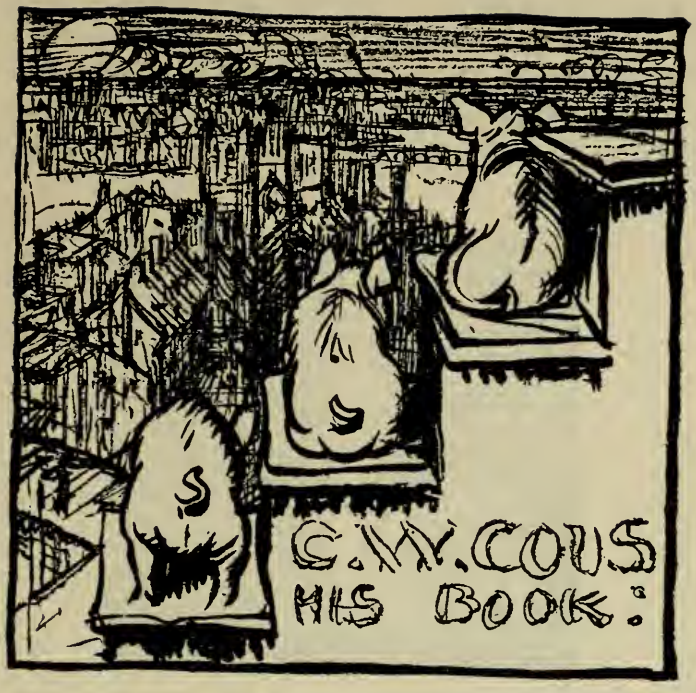
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